

INTERNET ADVERTISEMENT SYSTEM

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to a technique for delivering advertisements through the Internet to users, and more particularly, to an advertisement system on the Internet wherein detailed advertisement information associated with advertisement banners can be delivered to users easily and unobtrusively by e-mail.

A variety of web pages on the Internet now carry advertisement banners. When an end-user clicks on an advertisement banner on a web page, the end-user terminal is connected to a server hosting the web page of the advertiser which owns the banner, and the server then enables an end-user to view a copy of the page linked to the banner at their terminal. Although an end-user simply needs to click on an advertisement banner to receive advertisement banner-linked contents, inevitably there will be times when an end-user is unable to follow such a link and view an advertiser's page. Not only is it time consuming to follow link to a page and then view the contents, it is all so intrusive for a viewer. Consequently certain situations will preclude an end-user from following a banner link, such as participation in a chat room, participation at a game site, computer use at the workplace, and so on. Thus, although an end user may wish to view a page linked to an advertisement banner, they may be constrained from doing so. Such constraints represent a potential loss of business for the owners of advertisement banners. In addition, there will always be a case when an end-user, although not constrained from viewing an advertisement banner linked page, would rather not do so at the time the banner appears, preferring to delay such activity until some later time.

Conventional advertisement systems employed on the Internet, however, are unable to cater to the needs of users who are either constrained from viewing or disinclined to view advertisement banner-linked contents at

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the time an advertisement banner appears.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention has been accomplished with a view to overcoming these problems of the prior art. Namely, 5 it is an object of the present invention to provide an Internet advertisement system which will enable an end-user to acquire advertisement banner-linked contents unobtrusively, using a single click operation, and to then view such contents at leisure at some later time, as desired.

10 To achieve this object, the present invention provides an advertisement system on the Internet consisting of an advertisement server site, and at least one partner web site which provides a web page on the Internet and contains e-mail addresses of affiliate users, the 15 advertisement server site comprising:

(a) a first database for storing advertisement banners with respective identifications;

20 (b) a second database for storing detailed advertisement contents each having the same identification as that of one of the advertisement banners stored in the first database, the advertisement contents thereby being associated with the banners, respectively;

25 (c) means for providing the partner web site with at least one advertisement banner stored in the first database, the banner being carried on the web page provided by the partner web site;

30 (d) means for receiving an identification of the banner and an e-mail address of a user from the partner web site, when the web page of the partner web site is browsed on the user terminal and the banner thereon is clicked; and

(e) means for retrieving an advertisement content having the same identification as the received one and delivering it to the user terminal with the received e-mail address by e-mail.

35 The system according to the present invention makes it possible to include an advertisement banner in e-mail delivered from a partner web site, rather than simply carrying the banner on a web page.

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The present invention further provides an advertisement system on the Internet including an advertisement server site and at least one partner web site which provides a web page on the Internet, the 5 advertisement server site comprising:

- (a) a first database for storing advertisement banners with respective AD identifications;
- (b) a second database for storing detailed advertisement contents each having the same AD 10 identification as that of one of the advertisement banners stored in the first database, the advertisement contents thereby being associated with the banners, respectively;
- (c) a third database for storing end-user information including e-mail addresses of users;
- 15 (d) means for providing the partner web site with at least one advertisement banner stored in the first database, the banner being carried on the web page of the partner web site;
- 20 (e) means for determining whether an e-mail address of an end-user has been stored in the third database when the end-user accesses the web page of the partner web site;
- 25 (f) means, in response to the determination that the e-mail address of the end-user has been registered in the third database, for receiving the AD identification of the banner and an identification of the end-user from the partner web site, upon clicking the banner in the web page browsed at the end-user terminal;
- 30 (g) means, in response to the determination that an e-mail address of the end-user has not been registered in the third database, for receiving a vacante-mail from the end-user terminal, upon clicking the banner in the web page browsed on the end-user terminal, the vacante-mail containing the AD identification of the banner and a unique user identification allocated to the end-user, which are 35 embedded in the banner together with a mailto: tag indicative of the e-mail address of the advertisement server site, and storing an e-mail address with the end-user identification in the third database; and

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(h) means for retrieving an advertisement content having the received AD ID from the second database and an e-mail address having the user ID from the third database, and delivering the content through the Internet to the 5 end-user terminal having the retrieved e-mail address.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a block diagram explaining a general configuration of an advertisement system on the Internet according to the present invention;

10 Fig. 2 is a flowchart explaining an operation of a first embodiment of the advertisement system illustrated in Fig. 1;

15 Fig. 3 is a flowchart explaining an operation of a second embodiment of the advertisement system illustrated in Fig. 1; and

Fig. 4 is a diagram illustrating a message box or message dialog for sending a vacant e-mail which pops up when an advertisement banner is clicked.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

20 Fig. 1 is a block diagram showing an advertisement system on the Internet according to the present invention. The advertisement system comprises an advertisement server site 3 and web sites 4 which are partners of the advertisement server site 3. The advertisement server site 25 3 includes an advertisement banner providing server 31 for providing the partner web sites 4 with advertisement banners each comprised of a GIF image or the like, a user registration server 32 for receiving end-user information including at least e-mail addresses of end-users and 30 storing them in the advertisement server site 3, and a content mailing server 33 for delivering to end-user terminals 2 by e-mail, advertisement banner-linked contents . Each of the end-user terminals 2 may be a personal computer or a mobile phone connectable with the 35 Internet 1.

The advertisement server site 3 also comprises an advertisement banner database 34 connected to the banner providing server 31, an end-user database 35 connected to

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the end-user registration server 32 and an advertisement content database 36 connected to the content mailing server 33.

The advertisement banner database 34 stores the
5 advertisement banners of GIF images or the like together with advertisement identifications (AD IDs), which are read out therefrom by the banner providing server 31, and transferred to the partner web sites 4. The end-user database 35 registers, as end-user information, "e-mail address" of each end-user, and if possible, "user name", "end-user registration date", "sex," "age," "hobby," "number of banner click times" and so on of the end-user.
10 The end-user information is generally obtained from the partner web sites 4 which usually have obtained it as
15 affiliate end-user information. The content database 36 stores advertisement banner-linked contents corresponding to the respective advertisement banners in the banner database 34. The advertisement banner and its linked contents are provided with the same AD ID. The
20 advertisement banner-linked contents may be text information, image information, or a combination of the two.

The partner web sites 4 may be net-game service sites, chat room service sites and/or E-commerce sites having web-page-providing functions, though it is not intended
25 to restrict the partner web sites 4. Each of the partner web sites 4 receives some of previously contracted advertisement banners read out from the banner database 34 by the banner providing server 31 and places them on their web pages. It is also possible to carry the banner on an
30 e-mail to be transmitted from a mail server which may be included in designated partner web sites 4.

Now, a more detailed configuration of the advertisement system illustrated in Fig. 1 will be clarified by explaining an operation thereof with reference
35 to the flowchart shown in Fig. 2.

The procedure starts at Step S1 with access by an end-user to a particular partner web site 4 which hosts, for example, a net-game web page. On the net-game web page,

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at least one advertisement banner provided from the advertisement server site 3 is carried. Then the net-game web page is browsed at the end-user terminal 2, at Step S2. While playing the net-game, the end-user directs their 5 attention to the banner appearing at end-user terminal 2, and clicks on it at Step S3, thereby causing an AD ID embedded in the clicked banner to be transmitted to the partner web site 4. Then, it is determined at Step S4 whether the player is an affiliate of the partner web site 10 4 and thus whether the partner web site 4 has obtained his/her information containing at least his/her e-mail address. If so, the partner web site 4 transfers, at Step S5, the end-user information as well as the received AD ID to the advertisement server site 3.

15 In the advertisement server site 3, the end-user information is registered or updated in the end-user database 35 by the end-user registration server 32, and thereafter the end-user information and the AD ID of the clicked banner are transferred to the content mailing 20 server 33. At step S6, the content mailing server 33 reads from the content database 37, advertisement banner-linked content having the same AD ID as that received, and delivers it through the Internet 1 to the end-user terminal 2 having the receivede-mail address. The advertisement 25 banner-linked content may be sent as an appendix to an e-mail or in the actual e-mail text. Thus, advertisement banner-linked content can be delivered to the end-user by e-mail. In this way, an end-user is able to obtain an advertisement banner-linked content by a single click 30 operation while enjoying a game uninterrupted. The AD ID of the clicked banner can also be stored in the end-user database 35 to build an information base on an end-user's interests and preferences.

On the other hand, if it is determined at Step S4 35 that the end-user is not an affiliate of the partner web site 4 (which means that the web site 4 has not obtained an e-mail address of the end-user), the web site 4 sends a dialog to the end-user terminal 2 to enter his or her e-

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mail address at Step S7. If it is determined that the end-user enters the e-mail address at Step S8, the procedure goes from Step S8 to Step S5. If the end-user does not wish to enter his or here-mail address, at Step S9 the 5 partner web site 4 sends a message to the end-user terminal 2 that no advertisement banner-linked content be sent.

When a partner web site 4 provides a web page on which only affiliate end-users can enjoy a game or the like, the web site 4 usually has information including e-mail 10 addresses of the affiliate end-users. Therefore, the advertisement server site 3 can easily obtain an e-mail address of an end-user who has clicked on a banner on the web page, from the partner web site 4. The same is true in a case where one or more advertisement banners are carried 15 on e-mails which are sent to user terminals 2 from partner web sites 4, because their e-mail addresses have been registered in the web sites 4.

In this way, an end-user can view advertisement banner-linked content at leisure at a later time.

Fig. 3 is a flowchart illustrating another example of a procedure of the advertisement system according to the present invention. At Steps S21 and S22, an end-user accesses a web page of a partner web site 4, and the page is browsed at the end-user terminal 2. Then, at Step S23, 25 the partner web site 4 searches an identification of the end-user. The search may be executed by determining whether a cookie or a unique number functioning as the end-user ID has been allocated to the end-user terminal, and if so, by determining whether the end-user ID has been 30 registered. If the end-user ID is found at Step S23, the procedure goes to Step S24 where the partner web site 4 inquires of the advertisement server site 3, using the end-user ID, whether end-user information including an e-mail address has been registered in the end-user database 35.

If the end-user information has been registered in the end-user database 35, the web site 4 embeds the end-user ID in at least one banner, which in turn is displayed on the web page at Step S25. When the banner is clicked on

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by the end-user, the embedded end-user ID and AD ID are transferred to the advertisement server site 3 at Step S26. Then at Step S27, an e-mail address and advertisement banner-linked content are respectively retrieved from the 5 database 35 and 36 using the received end-user ID and AD ID, and the banner-linked content is delivered to the end-user terminal by e-mail.

On the other hand, if neither end-user ID nor end-user information (e-mail address) is found at Step S23 10 and S24, the procedure goes to Step S28, at which the partner web site 4 embeds a "from tag" including a "mailto: tag" for sending a vacant e-mail and a "unique ID" allocated to the end-user, into at least one banner. Then, the banner is inserted in the web page and browsed at the 15 end-user terminal 2. The "from tag" can be written as follows, for instance:

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<form method="post" action="mailto:xxxx@(AD server)">
    <input type=hidden name="subject" value="AD ID-END-USER
ID">
    <input type=image src="BANNER.gif">
</form>
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As will be apparent from the above, the from tag also contains the AD ID of the banner. The partner web site 4 further sends the end-user ID as a cookie to the end-user 25 terminal 2.

Subsequently at step S29, a message box as shown in Fig. 4 pops up when an end-user clicks on the banner. If the end-user then clicks on an "OK" button which appears on the message box, a vacant e-mail with the end-user's e-mail 30 address, the end-user's ID and the AD ID are sent to the advertisement server site 3 at Step S30. The e-mail address is stored in the end-user database 35, together with the user ID at Step S31, thereby the email address is retrievable with the user ID. Therefore, at Step S26, the 35 content mailing server 33 can deliver by e-mail, advertisement banner-linked content to the end-user terminal 2.

Thus, after the registration of an e-mail address

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together with a user ID, an end-user can obtain advertisement banner-linked content by a single click operation.

The advertisement system of the present invention
5 may be modified in various ways. For example, the advertisement banner providing server 31 may read a plurality of advertisement banners from the database 35 to simultaneously carry them on one web page of a partner web site 4, whereby the banners can be browsed simultaneously
10 on a monitor screen of a user terminal 2. Alternatively, a set of different advertisement banners on a web page may be replaced after the elapse of predetermined time periods.
In both cases, a user is able to click on two or more
banners on a web page.

15 As described above, a personal computer or a mobile phone is employed as the user terminal 2. However, it should be noted that only mobile phones allocated unique user IDs by partner web site 4 can be utilized as end-user terminals at present, because mobile phones are not
20 currently provided with an individual identification function utilizing cookies. If this function is provided in mobile phones, they will be able to be utilized as user terminals 2 even though they are not assigned user IDs.

The advertisement system according to the present
25 invention manifests itself as a significantly effective advertisement system both for users and advertisers, and also for partner web sites on which web pages linked to advertisement banners are carried.

To illustrate the significance of the present
30 invention, it is estimated that in conventional advertisement systems on the Internet, the number of end-users who click on advertisement banners to access web pages linked web pages is in the order of just 1% of total users. This can be attributed to the difficulties of
35 constraint and circumstance mentioned in the summary section of this specification. The advertisement system according to the present invention allows an end-user to view detailed advertisement information or a banner-linked

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content both at their leisure and repeatedly, since such a content is delivered by e-mail. In addition, such a content can be obtained by e-mail using a single click operation. Needless to say, a system which allows such 5 convenient and unobtrusive delivery of advertising content will have a big impact on the number of sales such content generators. In addition, at the most one click per visit is counted for a partner web site, resulting in a relatively low cost per click (CPC) for the partner web 10 site. However, since in the system of the present invention when an end-user clicks on an advertisement banner on a web page of a partner web site, the end-user is not taken to the advertiser's web page, a plurality of advertisement banners can be browsed simultaneously at an 15 end user's terminal and all of the browsed banner-linked content downloaded conveniently by e-mail. Accordingly, each time an end-user clicks on a banner, the click can be counted, thereby leading to an increase in advertising revenue for respective partner sites.

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